DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 428 CG 024 356

AUTHOR Rapaport, Ross J.
TITLE Student Self-Reflection on Alcohol Consumption: A Writing Assignment.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alcohol Abuse; College English; College Programs; College Students; *Drinking; *Freshman Composition; Higher Education; Prevention; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Attitudes; Student Behavior; *Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

This document describes a form of curriculum infusion for college instruction in which information about alcohol and other drug problems relevant to the content of a course is provided and related assignments are made. Specifically, the paper focuses on an English writing assignment that involved student self-reflection on his or her use or non-use of alcohol. The assignment described was given by 2 volunteer instructors to 117 students in 4 freshman English composition classes. The assignment itself is presented in this paper, along with instructor and student evaluations of the assignment. The evaluations were obtained through questionnaires concerning the impact of the assignment; the questionnaires were completed by both instructors and 92 of the students a few weeks after completion of the assignment. It is noted that the instructors thought the assignment was worthwhile and that it caused students to think about or evaluate the role of alcohol in their lives. The summary of student evaluations and excerpts from student evaluation forms illustrate that the students also saw the assignment as worthwhile; 97% of the students reported that the assignment should be repeated in future composition classes. A brief discussion section provides suggestions for implementing such an assignment and emphasizes the value of an intentional self-reflection component to efforts to educate students about the hazards of alcohol misuse. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED347428

STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION ON ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION:

A WRITING ASSIGNMENT

By

Ross J. Rapaport, Ph.D., NCC, LPC
Professor of Counseling
Central Michigan University
Counseling Center--102 Foust Hall
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859
(517)774-3381 (w)
(517)772-4509 (h)

Running Head: Student Self-Reflection

CG024356

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ross J. Rapaport

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Many college students' academic performance and personal lives are negatively influenced by the misuse of alcohol and use of other drugs (Johnston, Bachman & O'Malley, 1992). Effectively responding to and trying to prevent alcohol and other drug problems requires coordinated effort and the involvement of many members of the campus community (Rapaport & Norton, 1992, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991a). Teaching faculty are in a particularly influential position to become involved in campus efforts to reduce alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems. Faculty can learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of troubled students, how and where to refer students who have problems, announce alcohol and other drug educational events, not make comments which imply that all students drink alcohol and come to class hung over on certain days, not hold study and review sessions in bars or places where alcohol is served, develop courses that help educate students about alcohol and other drugs, become more educated about AOD issues by attending educational programs and in-service training, incorporate AOD information relevant to the content of the course, and make AOD assignments (Rapaport and Norton, 1992, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991b).

Providing AOD information relevant to the content of the course and making AOD related assignments is called "curriculum infusion." "Curriculum infusion" has been discussed by the Michigan Consortium on Substance Abuse Education since the early to mid-1980's and educational materials suggesting many ways of incorporating AOD education into a variety of courses was included in the 1989 National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week educational materials (Inter-Association Task Force on Alcohol and Other Substance

Abuse Issues, 1989). Curriculum infusion involves creatively looking for course relevant ways of including AOD information into course content. The purpose of this paper is to present an English writing assignment which involves student self-reflection on one's use or non-use of alcohol. Other drug use experiences were not included because alcohol is the primary drug of abuse on college campuses (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1992).

Using English class assignments to explore the misuse of alcohol has been tried and discussed by others (General Studies Writing Program, 1988; Starling, 1990). At Bowling Green State University an alcohol awareness proficiency exam was developed by the General Studies Writing Program. Students were to read five alcohol education articles and then answer a number of essay questions in order to demonstrate proficiency in alcohol awareness. Starling (1990) discusses how in English literature classes selected writers' alcoholism can be responsibly discussed. Also the role of alcoholism in literature itself can be explored with sufficient examples and discussion.

Though these types of assignments and instruction are no doubt useful, one must question to what extent they lead the student to evaluate his or her own relationship with alcohol. Another type of assignment encourages the student to self-reflect on the consequences of his or her own experiences with alcohol. This approach is based upon Kolb, Rubin & Osland's (1990) model of the learning process, where "[Learning] can be conceived of as a four-stage cycle: (1) Concrete experience is followed by (2) observation and reflection, which lead to (3) the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, which lead to (4) hypotheses to be tested in future action, which in turn lead to new experiences (pp 58-59)."

This experiential learning model focuses on individual experiences and the importance of providing an opportunity for self-reflection upon experiences so that one might learn from them. Many alcohol education approaches (e.g. Gonzalez, 1989) though comprehensive in scope do not emphasize self-reflection. Consequently, information may not be personalized. An expository writing assignment, if structured appropriately, provides an excellent opportunity for student self-reflection on certain aspects of their behavior. Such an assignment was given to 117 students in four freshman English composition classes winter semester, 1991 at Central Michigan University.

The Assignment

The English Department was asked to encourage English 101 composition instructors to make the following assignment. Students were asked to:

> "Write a paper which clarifies your personal position about the role of alcohol in your life. In developing your position identify those aspects of your life and personal values most important to you and the relative importance of alcohol use. Examine your own personal experiences (positive and negative) with alcohol, along with the experiences of others you know. Show how these experiences have influenced your decision to not use alcohol at all, use alcohol a little, or use alcohol often."

All participating students also received handouts which included diagnostic mnemonics for alcoholism and summarized common negative consequences of the misuse of alcohol (e.g. As a result of alcohol, having: thoughts about suicide, passed out, lowered potential, missed classes, thrown up in sleep, physically injured yourself, overdosed, had unwanted sex, received poor grades, gotten a sexually transmitted disease, had a hangover, blacked out, caused fights and arguments, done something stupid, driven while drunk, embarrassed yourself, been arrested, had your stomach pumped, or experienced a variety of academic

difficulties).

Method and Results

Two instructors volunteered to give the assignment to 119 students in four English 101 classes. Approximately 3-5 weeks later the two instructors and ninety-two of the students completed a brief questionnaire concerning the impact the assignment had on them. Questionnaire respondents were predominately female (57%), freshmen (85%), most lived on campus (89%), and were white, not of hispanic origin (95%).

Instructor Evaluation

The instructor evaluation consisted of two five-point Likert-type questions, one yes-no question, and three open-ended questions. Both instructors thought the assignment was worthwhile. One instructor wrote, "... I found most students commenting that they enjoyed writing about this subject." The other instructor thought the assignment was "very topical, reflecting campus social life and prevalence of alcohol at social functions."

The instructors thought the assignment caused students to think about or evaluate the role of alcohol in their lives, at least somewhat. One instructor commented, "Some with obvious problems preferred to continue rationalization of heavy use. Others re-thought their 'automatic' habit of drinking at social occasions." Both instructors reported positive student outcomes resulting from this assignment including self-examination, identifying feelings, clarifying feelings and that most students wrote good essays. One instructor reported a student said this was the most interesting writing assignment for the class. No negative outcomes for the assignment were observed by the instructors and both thought the assignment should be repeated. Additional instructor comments included the observation

that student response to the assignment was very positive and thanking the author for an excellent assignment.

Student Evaluation

Student evaluations also consisted of two five-point Likert-type questions, one yes-no question, and three open-ended questions. In response to the question, "To what extent did you find self-reflecting on the role of alcohol in your life a worthwhile exercise?" most students indicated the assignment was somewhat worthwhile (57%) or very worthwhile (37%). Representative positive comments included "I felt it was worth my time because it made me think about how I use alcohol," "I don't drink, but it allowed me to examine why I don't," "It made me think about just how important alcohol is to me," "I never really thought about it until then," "It helped me take a close look again at my own personal problem and realize what it was doing to me," and "I reflected on the devastating losses that have occurred in my life because of alcohol." Neutral or negative comments included "I did not learn anything new about myself in the assignment," "I choose not to drink," "I have forgotten everything that crossed my mind while doing the assignment."

In response to the question, "To what extent did completing this assignment cause you to think about or evaluate your own alcohol use?" most students indicated somewhat (51%) or a considerable amount (42%). Representative comments to this question were: "I haven't altered my usage much, but a little bit," "It forced me to admit to myself how alcohol has been a pitfall in my life," "I still drink the same amount," "I have to cut back my drinking considerably."

Thirty students wrote a variety of comments in response to a question concerning positive outcomes of the assignment. Two students said there were no positive outcomes. Representative comments included: "It made me realize that I do use alcohol wisely," "I slowed down a lot," "I did think about use and it made me reflect on it and choose little to no use," "I realized that alcohol abuse is really dangerous and should be taken more seriously," "I haven't drank since," "It made me look at myself and tell myself to start taking better care of my body."

Fifty-three students said they experienced no negative outcomes from writing the paper. The negative comments written involved students becoming more aware of the problems associated with alcohol, reliving painful memories associated with the misuse of alcohol by one's self or others and negative self-examination of one's own use of alcohol. Representative comments included: "I had to reflect on some bad memories," "I found out I drink too much," "I was ashamed of myself after I wrote the paper," "My friends drink too much."

In response to the question, "Should this assignment be repeated in future composition classes?" the vast majority indicated yes (97%). Representative comments were: "It is a worthwhile exercise. It makes you look at your own alcohol use," "It makes people think more about what they are doing," "I think it gives people a chance to reflect on their lives and whether or not they are on the right track," "This assignment helped me to realize that I need to find other things to do than drink," "Maybe it will help someone."

Discussion

The instructors and most students found the expository writing assignment which emphasized self-reflection upon one's own use of alcohol useful. Many students seemed to benefit from the experience with no serious negative consequences observed.

Before implementing this sort of writing assignment it is important to talk with the English department's composition coordinator. Make a presentation to those faculty members who teach composition the semester before you wish to implement the program so they have ample time to modify course outlines and plans.

Finally, all efforts to educate students about the hazards of misuse of alcohol can be strengthened by adding an intentional self-reflection component. Asking students to self-reflect, including discussions which incorporate personal self-evaluation of alcohol use, and simply keeping this principle in mind as one structures educational programs can be helpful. Encouraging self-reflection or self-evaluation is one way to help students realize that they are not invulnerable to the potential harmful effects of alcohol misuse.

REFERENCES

General Studies Writing Program. (1988). Information packet for the english 110/111 proficiency exam on alcohol awareness. Unpublished educational materials, Bowling Green State University, General Studies Writing Program, Bowling Green, OH.

Gonzalez, G. (1989). An integrated theoretical model for alcohol and other drug abuse prevention on the college campus. Journal of College Student Development, 30(6), 492-503.

Inter-Association Task Force on Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse Issues. (1989). National collegiate alcohol awareness week: The new decade of awareness and beyond. Alcohol education materials, Golden, Colorado: Coors Brewing Company.

Johnson, L.D., Bachman, J.G., & O'Malley, P.M. (1992). Drug use, drinking, and smoking: National survey results from high school, college, and young adults populations. Washington, D.C.: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Kolb, D.A., Rubin, I.M., & Osland, J. (1991). Organizational behavior: An experiential approach. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Rapaport, R.J., & Norton, P. (1992). Putting the pieces together for institutions of higher education: An action guide for the reduction of alcohol related problems on college and university campuses. Clare, MI: Mid-State Substance Abuse Commission.

Starling, R. (1990). The impact of alcoholism: The writer, the story, the student. College Teaching, 38(3), 88-92.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1991a). Program administrator's handbook: Strategies for preventing alcohol and other drug problems. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1991b). Faculty members handbook: Strategies for preventing alcohol and other drug problems. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.